

Acupuncture for Fibromyalgia Syndrome

Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS) affects an estimated 2 percent of the population. Conventional therapies are limited in the success of treating this complex and unexplained condition. Current treatment is largely comprised of prescribing different medications for the varying symptoms in a trial and error approach. Research shows that as many as 90 percent of people with fibromyalgia have turned to complimentary and alternative medicine to manage their symptoms. Acupuncture, in particular, has become a popular treatment choice and has shown to be an effective treatment for FMS.

What is Fibromyalgia Syndrome?

Fibromyalgia is a medically unexplained syndrome characterized by chronic widespread pain, a heightened and painful response to pressure, insomnia, fatigue, and depression. While not all affected persons experience all associated symptoms, the following symptoms commonly occur together:

- chronic pain
- debilitating fatigue
- difficulty sleeping
- anxiety and depression
- joint stiffness
- chronic headaches and jaw pain
- difficulty swallowing
- dryness in mouth, nose, and eyes
- hypersensitivity to odors, bright lights, and loud noises
- inability to concentrate (called "fibro fog")
- incontinence
- irritable bowel syndrome
- numbness or tingling in the fingers and feet
- painful menstrual cramps
- poor circulation in hands and feet (called Raynaud's phenomenon)
- restless legs syndrome



Fibromyalgia is diagnosed when there is a history of widespread pain in all four quadrants of the body for a minimum duration of three months and pain when pressure is applied to at least 11 of 18 designated tender points on the body. This condition does not result in any physical damage to the body or its tissues and there are no laboratory tests which can confirm this diagnosis.

Symptoms often begin after a physical or emotional trauma, but in many cases there appears to be no triggering event. Women are more prone to develop the disorder than are men, and the risk of fibromyalgia increases with age.

From an Eastern Perspective

The Oriental medicine theory of pain is expressed in this famous Chinese saying: "*Bu tong ze tong, tong ze bu tong*" which means "*free flow: no pain, no free flow: pain.*"

Pain is seen as a disruption of the flow of Qi within the body. The disruption of Qi that results in fibromyalgia is usually associated with disharmonies of the Liver, Spleen, Kidney and Heart Systems.

The Acupuncture Treatment

Oriental Medicine does not recognize fibromyalgia as one particular disease pattern. Instead, it aims to treat the specific symptoms that are unique to each individual depending on their constitution, emotional state, intensity and location of their pain, digestive health, sleeping patterns and an array of other signs and symptoms. Therefore, if 10 people are treated with Oriental medicine for fibromyalgia, each of these 10 people will receive a unique, customized treatment with different acupuncture points, different herbs and different lifestyle and dietary recommendations.

Because the symptoms of fibromyalgia are highly variable from one person to another, a wide array of traditional and alternative treatments has been shown to be the most effective way of treating this difficult syndrome. A treatment program may include a combination of psychological or behavioral therapies, medications, exercise, acupuncture, herbal medicine and bodywork.

Study on Acupuncture and Fibromyalgia

A recent study from the Mayo Clinic found acupuncture helpful in treating the fatigue and anxiety commonly experienced by fibromyalgia patients. In the trial, patients who received acupuncture to counter their fibromyalgia symptoms reported improvement in fatigue and anxiety, among other symptoms. Acupuncture was well tolerated, with minimal side effects.

In the double-blind study, Mayo Clinic doctors gave 25 fibromyalgia patients acupuncture, and 25 "sham" acupuncture treatments. Patients received six treatments during the two- to three-week study. Those who received acupuncture treatments reported less fatigue and anxiety one month following after treatment than did the "sham" group.

"The results of the study convince me there is something more than the placebo effect to acupuncture," says David Martin, M.D., Ph.D., lead author of the acupuncture article and a Mayo Clinic anesthesiologist. "It affirms a lot of clinical impressions that this complementary medical technique is helpful for patients."

Dr. Martin says the study demonstrates that acupuncture is helpful, and also proves physicians can conduct a rigorous, controlled acupuncture study. Future research could help physicians understand which medical conditions respond best to acupuncture, how to apply it to best relieve symptoms, and how long patients can expect to their symptoms to decrease after each treatment.

Dr. Martin performed the study at Mayo Clinic Rochester with co-authors Ines Berger, M.D.; Christopher Sletten, Ph.D.; and Brent Williams. The study used only two acupuncturists and examined only patients who reported more severe symptoms, offering better experimental control. Still, the Mayo Clinic doctors urged more study to see how acupuncture can best be used in treating fibromyalgia patients.

Source: Mayo Clinic (2006, June 13). Acupuncture Relieves Symptoms Of Fibromyalgia, Mayo Clinic Study Finds.

10 Tips for Preventing Fibromyalgia

You can help cut your risk significantly by incorporating a few simple lifestyle changes into your daily routines and habits, according to Bo Flaws, author of *Curing Fibromyalgia Naturally with Chinese Medicine*.

1. Eliminate processed foods from your diet, especially white sugar and white flour products. These products give our bodies little nutrition and over time can damage our digestion as well as cause obesity, one of the common problems related to fibromyalgia.
2. Include all unprocessed foods in your diet, such as proteins, complex and unrefined carbohydrates, vegetables, whole grains and legumes.
3. Eat foods that support the functions of the spleen and stomach. In other words, avoid overly greasy foods, ice cold drinks, alcohol, raw and uncooked foods, hot, peppery foods, coffee, and too much fruit. Avoid daily juice drinks since these are the same as eating a candy bar in the amount of sugar introduced into the body.
4. Stop drinking sodas. Sodas are acidic in nature and loaded with sugar and chemicals. Sodas are detrimental to both the spleen and the kidneys.
5. Find some type of exercise that you really enjoy and just do it! Pumping iron is not for everyone. You would probably benefit most from some kind of cardiovascular exercise

to keep to blood moving, like swimming, yoga, stretching, and bicycling.

6. Take a walk every day. If you live with a dog or cat, play with them daily. Animals live in the moment and love to play. This is a great way to break stressful daily routines.

7. Practice Chinese self massage every morning by stimulating the acupuncture points on the body and limbs to help promote the flow of Qi and blood in the channels.

8. Buy some relaxation tapes with guided imaging. Learn how to really relax. This means bodily relaxation as well as mental repose. Use these tapes daily for the best results.

9. Take a look at the old habits and patterns of your life and ask yourself what you can do to make your life better. Take up tasks and hobbies that are interesting to you and break the normal routine of your day.

10. If you know that you have too much stress in your life, find a solution. This may be finding a new job or new, more supportive relationships. Understand that stress alone can kill you, and if you smoke and consume alcohol to escape stressful situations, you are only fooling yourself.

